

# 4-H Grab and Go: *Recognizing My Stress*

**Concept:**

Negative stress can increase vulnerability or susceptibility to risk-taking behaviors.

**Age/Grade Level:**

Middle school: Ages 12-15

**Education Standard:**

National Health Education Standard 2: Analyze the influences of family, peers, culture, media, technology, and other factors on health behaviors.

**Life Skill:**

Healthy Life Choices, Self-Responsibility, Stress Management

**Success Indicator:**

Youth will identify their personal stress symptoms.

**National 4-H Curriculum:**

**Health  
Rocks!**

4-H ■ HEALTHY LIFE SERIES

**PREPARATION**

**Time:** 30 – 45 minutes

**Space:** Classroom

**Materials:**

- Pencils/pens
- Topics (Written on separate pieces of paper)
  - ◆ Youth and Drugs
  - ◆ Drug Prevention in Our Community
  - ◆ Over-the-Counter Drugs — Are They A Problem?
  - ◆ Self-Esteem in Teenagers
  - ◆ How to Relieve Stress in a Teenager's Life

**Background Information:**

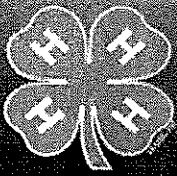
Stress can affect a person in a number of different ways. Symptoms are felt physically, emotionally, behaviorally, or cognitively. This will depend on how well youth are able to cope, the resources available to them, the amount of stress they have at the time, and the type of stress they are facing.

Our bodies are built to react and cope with outside stressors. When a person encounters something stressful, such as an emergency, several of the body's glands are alerted. The hypothalamus gland (located in the brain) signals the pituitary gland (also located in the brain). Together they set off a flow of signals that tells the adrenal gland (located right above the kidney) to release hormones (epinephrine, norepinephrine, and cortisol). These hormones help the body to get an extra surge of energy ("fight or flight" response) in order to deal with the stressor.

When we are stressed, the surge of energy causes our breathing to increase, heart rate to increase, and other bodily functions to be affected.

**Instructions:**

1. Once the group is seated, share that you have a BIG surprise. Before they came in, you got a call from one of your state's U.S. Senators. He or she has heard about your group and the *Health Rocks!* project. The senator has agreed to give money to help the group do some really great things and will give all of you a trip to Washington D.C. to share with other legislators what you are doing. However, before he/she will sponsor us, the senator wants to hear about some of the things you have been learning and has selected some specific topics on which you will give a five minute presentation. The senator is in town today and wants to meet with your group in just a few minutes. The topics are:
  - Youth and Drugs
  - Drug Prevention in Our Community
  - Over-the-Counter Drugs – Are They A Problem?
  - Self-Esteem in Teenagers
  - How to Relieve Stress in a Teenager's Life
2. Tell the group they need to quickly divide into small groups of three or four. Give each group a piece of paper with their selected topic. Then, looking at a watch or clock, exclaim that the senator will arrive in about five minutes and they need to be prepared.
3. Let youth struggle with this activity for about three to five minutes. Then, tell them to return to the large group and share that this is a



# Recognizing My Stress

## Youth Development Tips:

The size of the small groups will depend on the number in the group. If there are only a few, have them work in pairs. If there are more than 10 to 12, have participants divide into groups of three.

In this activity the leader needs to act excited, nervous, and stressed although they know this is not really happening.

## Open Ended Questions:

- How did you feel when you thought the senator was coming?
- What happened to your stress level when you learned it was just part of the activity?
- How did this activity make you feel?
- In what other situations have you felt this way?
- If the senator had really arrived, how would you have felt?
- How do your feelings about stress impact how you make decisions about tobacco, alcohol, and drugs?

fake activity. Explain why you did this activity (to help them learn more about stress).

4. Explain when a person encounters stress, it can affect them in several different ways. It can affect them physically, emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively. Each individual handles stress in a different way and stress can affect everyone differently as well.
5. What physical symptoms did you have? What emotional symptoms did you have? What behavioral symptoms did you have? What cognitive symptoms did you have?

### Physical Symptoms

Extremely tired \* Headaches \* Difficulty sleeping \* Dizziness \* Sleeping too much \* Frequently sick \* Dry mouth \* Lump in throat \* Tight or aching neck and shoulders \* Increased perspiration \* Heartburn \* Backache or pain \* Faster beating heart

### Emotional Symptoms

Irritable \* Increased outbursts of anger \* Overly aggressive \* Withdrawn \* Anxious \* Lack of initiative \* Cry a lot \* Excessive worry \* Apathetic or indifferent \* Overly critical \* Lack of concentration \* Feeling of helplessness \* Overly emotional \* Impatient \* Unhappy

### Behavioral Symptoms

Grinding teeth \* Loss of appetite \* Overeating \* Fidgety and restless \* Increased alcohol consumption \* Acting out \* Trembling leg \* Smoking or using tobacco products \* Using drugs \* Tapping fingers or feet \* Nail biting \* Grades go down

### Cognitive Symptoms (affecting one's ability to think, reason, remember)

Difficulty with memory \* Inability to concentrate \* Can't make decisions \* Trouble thinking clearly \* Use poor judgment \* Negative \* Constantly worrying \* Confused

6. Review the **Open Ended Questions**.

## Additional Notes/Extension/Glossary

**Cognitive** - intellectual activity which includes the ability to think, reason, and remember.

**Good stress or eustress** - stress that motivates, gives extra energy or stimulates.

**Bad stress or distress** - stress which affects you in a negative way, affects you physically, emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively, and can cause long-term health problems.

## Learn More

The following website provides additional information:

[http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/headsup/support/stress\\_t6.pdf](http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/headsup/support/stress_t6.pdf)